

Putting the Lord First

*Those who honor Me I will honor,
and those who despise me will be lightly esteemed. (1 Samuel 2:20)*

The first two examples are men who were not Christians, but two baseball players who held firmly to their Jewish faith in spite of great pressure to do otherwise:

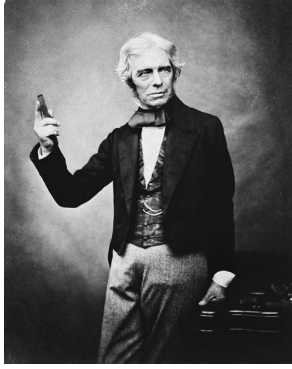


Hank Greenberg was the first Jew to enter baseball's Hall of Fame. In 1934, in the midst of a crucial pennant race, he was the best player on his Tigers team. However, he chose to spend Yom Kippur in a synagogue, probably costing his team a victory (the Tigers lost that day without him). Edgar Guest wrote this poem on the occasion: *Come Yom Kippur—holy fast day wide-world over to the Jew/And Hank Greenberg to his teaching and the old tradition true/Spent the day among his people and he didn't come to play/Said Murphy to Mulrooney, "We shall lose the game today!/We shall miss him in the infield and shall miss him at the bat/But he's true to his religion—and we honor him for that."*

On October 6, 1965 Sandy Koufax, the overpowering lefty for the Dodgers did not pitch in the first game of the World Series against the Minnesota Twins because game day fell on Yom Kippur. To a baseball player, nothing is more important than winning the World Series, yet Koufax believed there was something even more important. The Dodgers lost this key first game. However, Koufax came back to beat the Twins in the seventh game, in what many consider to be one of the best pitched games in baseball history.



Jeremiah Horrocks (1618-1641) was a brilliant astronomer and clergyman who calculated when a transit of Venus would occur (when Venus would pass across the disk of the sun). This was the key discovery of his life, but it just so happened that this transit was to take place on a Sunday (Nov. 24, 1639). What should he do? Horrocks honored God and went to church. As a result God honored him (1 Sam. 2:30) and he was able to catch a glimpse of the transit in between services (according to Britannica.com). In his journal are these words which are now written over his monument: "Called aside to greater things which ought not to be neglected for the sake of subordinate pursuits." He died at the early age of 22.



Michael Faraday was an eminent English scientist. He discovered many important principles in the fields of chemistry, magnetism and electricity. His fame brought him many times into the company of prominent people, including the royal family, who often came to hear his lectures and see his demonstrations on magnetism. On one occasion, after he had delivered his lecture, an enthusiastic crowd rocked the house with applause. Then there was complete silence. The audience waited for him to reappear, but he never did. Only a couple of his close friends knew what had become of him. Faraday was a devout Christian. The very hour at which he concluded his lecture was the hour of the weekly prayer meeting—a meeting he never neglected. While the crowd was cheering and applauding, the scientist slipped away to meet with fellow believers and to pray.

The account of Olympian Eric Liddell is well known. Liddell was Scotland's fastest sprinter. He was their hero. He had won every 100-meter race he had run since early in his running career. In 1924 Eric had earned a spot on the 100-meter British Olympic team with a good chance to win the gold. However, Eric had announced to his country that he could not run in the Olympic 100-meter race because the finals were scheduled on a Sunday. Sunday to him was a sacred day of worship. He decided not to run, even if he were his country's only hope of winning an Olympic gold medal. This made the Scottish people very upset with Eric. They wrote bad things about him in the newspaper and some people even called him a traitor. But Eric stood firm. He had never run on Sunday and never would, not even for an Olympic gold medal.



With very little time before the Olympics, Eric trained and qualified for another race that was not scheduled on a Sunday. Eric knew that his chance of winning the 400-meter race was slim because it was not his favored race and two of the runners in this race had set world record times. In addition, on the day of the race, Eric was assigned the worst lane. The team trainer had put a note in Eric's pocket which read, "He who honors Him (God), He (God) will honor." Eric knew his decision not to run on Sunday honored God.

So Eric ran in a race that was not exactly suited for him, and yet he won the race and even set a new world record. He soon became a hero once again to his countrymen, but not for long. He would soon announce his plan to stop running and instead to go to China as a missionary. He eventually ended up in a Chinese prison camp where he died. According to a fellow missionary his last words were, "It's complete surrender" referring to how completely he had given his life to God.

Contrast these examples with the SuperBowl in America where so many churches have capitulated to the big game by either cancelling their evening services or by inviting their congregants to come to church and watch the Superbowl together on a big screen. (2 Tim. 3:4)